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Is There a Christian View of Everything from Soup to Nuts?

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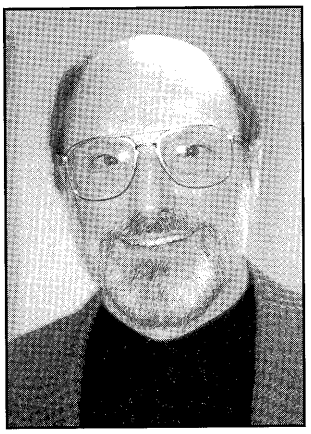
Is There a Christian View of Everything From Soup to Nuts?



by Roy Clouser

In response to the topic "Is There a Christian View of Everything From Soup to Nuts?" the first question one might ask is "Why should there be?" While one can articulate a Christian view of God, a Christian view of how to stand in right relation to God, and a Christian view of ethics, why is it necessary to articulate a distinctly Christian view of *everything*? How would one articulate such a view? What, after all, would be a Christian view of fluid dynamics or heat transfer? What would be a Christian view of "one plus one makes two?" Is not the answer to that math problem the same for everybody? And is there a Christian logic? Are not the logical rules also the same for everybody? To answer such questions, one must first look at what Scripture actually says about the topic.

The fifteen or eighteen biblical texts that address the issue of whether there should be a biblical, theistic view of everything are one of the best-kept secrets in the history of Christian theology, philosophy, and Christian scholarly work. Beginning with Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, and 15:33, we find that "the fear of the Lord is the foundation of all knowledge." The word translated "foundation" means *the key part*, or principal part, of knowledge. Does that statement really mean that there should be a biblical view of everything, or is it merely the psalmist's and the proverb writer's use of poetic hyperbole to express enthusiasm over life under the guidance of God? These Old Testament texts are made clearer in the light of New Testament texts.

In Luke 11, Jesus is reproving the interpreters of the law when he says to them, "You have twisted the meaning of the law of God and, by doing that, you have taken away the key to knowledge." Looking at this text, we recall that "key" was the Hebrew term in the texts from the Psalms and Proverbs. As those texts said that the "key" part of all knowledge is the knowledge of God, we find it significant that Jesus repeats that idea in a context that is obviously *not* poetic. One could interpret

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his words as having an elliptical implication: what he meant was that rightly interpreting God's Word is the key to the knowledge of God. He just stopped too soon; he really meant, "you have destroyed the knowledge *of God*," not *all knowledge whatsoever.*

While this interpretation is possible if we take the text in isolation, other New Testament texts that address the same issue indicate that we ought not to conclude that Jesus' remark was elliptical. In I Corinthians 1:5, Paul says that we are enriched by knowing God through Christ in a way that (somehow) impacts "all knowledge." That passage doesn't sound elliptical at all, and it is certainly not poetic. It also surely distinguishes between the knowledge of God and all the other sorts of knowledge that are impacted by knowing God. Confirmation of this point is evident in what Paul says later in the same letter. In chapter 13, Paul talks about gifts that come to us by the Spirit; one of those gifts, he says, is knowledge. He adds that in the end those gifts, including knowledge, will be done away with. At the close of the chapter, however, he speaks of the knowledge of God as another kind of knowledge that will not pass away. He says that although the "gift" of knowledge will cease, we will then *know* God just as he knows us, namely, face to face. So the knowledge *of God* is not one of the gifts that are going to go away. In that case, the knowledge that he's talking about, the temporary gift, is not the same as the knowledge *of God.* This passage shows that Paul makes the distinction between the two very clearly; therefore, even if one might prefer to think that Jesus' remark was elliptical, one can't say that Paul's remark is. What he says here is that knowing God through Christ affects "every sort of knowledge."

If one needs more confirmation, Paul, in Ephesians 5, says that knowing God through Christ has "fruit" (consequences) for "all that is good and *true*." So there are consequences to knowing God, consequences that, in some unspecified but favorable way, impact *every truth.* In the light of these more explicit New Testament texts, it therefore appears that the Old Testament texts should also be taken to affirm this point. They occur in a poetic context, but that context does not in any way diminish their importance.

So my answer to the question "Is there a Christian view of everything from soup to nuts?" is that according to Bible writers, there is certainly supposed to be. They don't tell us exactly *how* knowing God impacts every truth and all sorts of knowledge. They don't even say explicitly whether knowing God impacts truth and knowledge in such a way that without it no one has any knowledge whatever, or that without it knowledge is only partially falsified. However, since in many places they treat unbelievers as knowing some things at least partially, one can infer that not knowing God results only in a partial falsification of every truth. In other words, there is some kind of mistake with respect to every kind of truth and knowledge that can't be avoided if one does not know God but can be avoided if one does know God. While they don't say that avoiding that mistake is guaranteed, they do say that avoiding that mistake is at least possible.

If this explanation is right, it has enormous implications for what a Christian education ought to be. There is a big difference between what this principle implies and what is usually done by Christian schools. Most Christian schools simply add Bible study or theology and worship to the curriculum. The various arts and sciences are then taught pretty much the same way that they would be taught anywhere else. However, what these scriptural texts demand is nothing less than teaching every subject from a distinctly biblical perspective that enables the study to avoid whatever the error is that can be avoided only by knowing God. For most Christians, and for the average Christian school in the United States of whatever ilk—Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, or whatever it is—this is a foreign idea. The average Christian school merely conducts education in a Christian setting. When they call themselves "Christian," they mean that they are free to open the school year with mass or free to open a class with prayer or free to include theology or religion courses in the curriculum. However, when it comes to math, physics, chemistry, biology, history, sociology, literature, they teach pretty much what is taught anywhere else.

That is exactly the kind of division that I encountered at a Roman Catholic University in Philadelphia, the place of my first full-time

teaching position. The courses in theology and the required course called "the philosophy of man" gave a Christian point of view, but those courses aside, everything else was the same. That is what I mean by education in a Christian setting rather than a *Christian* education. However, if, according to the texts we just looked at, education in a Christian setting is just not enough, what does it mean for the knowledge of God to impact every sort of knowledge and every truth? How would that work?

In the whole history of Christianity up to the twentieth century, only two proposals explained this scriptural teaching. The first proposal, the older one, is associated with St. Thomas Aquinas. Because he was such a fine spokesman for it and carried it out so well in his work, I call his proposal the "Thomas Rule." The Thomas Rule is this: Whatever one is studying, whatever theory one proposes, or whatever interpretation one develops, it is wrong as soon as it contradicts anything revealed by God.

This rule certainly sounds right. If one is working on a theory that ends up contradicting something revealed by God, one knows that the theory is wrong. Even though that rule sounds like a good place to start, it doesn't sound like a way to discover a uniquely biblical perspective on every subject. It doesn't begin to bring into play the demands of the texts we just examined. For no matter how carefully we employ the Thomas rule, it is still going to leave 99.9999 percent of all theories neutral with respect to belief in God. Most theories don't contradict any revealed truth and will therefore simply not be impacted by belief in God at all.

This point brings us to the second proposal for how belief in God could impact knowledge, including theories. A number of Christian thinkers saw that scripture demands a thicker engagement of revealed truth with the various disciplines that we teach. They saw Scripture as demanding more than simply making sure that proving a theory does not involve contradicting revealed truth. Rather, revealed truth must yield positive as well as negative guidance if all knowledge is to be affected by knowing God. This attitude grew with the rise of modern science. Beginning in the seventeenth century, a number of prominent figures who contributed to the rise of science sought to supplement the Thomas Rule. Their proposal was to institute a program of trying to find key truths in scripture for every field of study. That idea is now ridiculed as fundamentalism. However, it was actually promoted by people like Newton, Boyle, Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, and others. As a result, the seventeenth century saw the onset of a concerted effort by scientists to appeal to Scripture for key truths to guide them in what they were doing. This appeal to scripture was done in physics, astronomy, geology, biology, and so on. This appeal to Scripture for key truths for guidance developed into what we came to call fundamentalism by the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. And it is this program that I take to be the central idea of fundamentalism. The fundamentalist is not, therefore, someone who insists on an overly literalistic interpretation of Scripture. (That emphasis sometimes happens, but often fundamentalists don't take scripture literally enough!) The key to the fundamentalist program is what I call the encyclopedic assumption: the treating of Scripture as if it's an encyclopedia.

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This approach is surely one way to get a thicker engagement of belief in God with all sorts of knowledge. It goes beyond the Thomas Rule by insisting that for whatever subject matter a Christian may want to investigate, the first task is to ransack the Scriptures to find what they teach on that subject; a science must start with those revealed truths and go from there. This approach, then, gives positive guidance. It doesn't tell only when something is wrong with a theory.

Of course, its assumption is that Scripture is going to say something on any subject one wants to know about. If one is concerned with how old the earth is, for example, one searches the Scriptures for figures to add up, a tactic that

eventually to the conclusion that the earth is six thousand years old. The fundamentalist Henry Morris actually makes this claim in one of his books. He says that when he was young, he was very concerned with the age of the Earth. Then he writes these two sentences: "But this was too important an issue for there not to be an answer in God's Word. Surely there is an answer in God's Word!" (I find it a little odd that he was upset and worried about the age of the Earth. If I were looking for God to slip us a few tips like that, I'd have wanted to know about the causes of disease, not the age of the planet.)

I find that the basis of the fundamentalist way of reading Scripture is not a theoretical or even a theological mistake; rather, it is very deep-rooted *religious* failing. Anyone who approaches God's Word with the assumption that God has got to tell us what we want to know, instead of with the attitude that we need to listen to what God wants us to know, has got things backwards.

A further error in the fundamentalist approach to reading Scripture is its inability to satisfy the scriptural texts that we stated above. If we assume for the moment that the fundamentalist program is right, what we must do to arrive at a Christian view of any subject is to search the Scriptures for truths about our topic of inquiry. Can this program satisfy the texts we just examined? Will even the most passionate fundamentalist be able to get key truths from scripture for heat transfer or fluid dynamics? What would those truths be? Suppose we want to know about psychological defense mechanisms. What are we going to find in Scripture? Suppose we want to make theories about mathematics; suppose we want to know if arithmetic is reducible to set theory. What texts are we going to use as guidance? I know of one fundamentalist theologian who actually claimed that he could deduce the calculus from the Bible, but he's since taken that back (I say that to his credit). My point is this: even if it were correct, wouldn't the fundamentalist program also leave 99 percent of all theories neutral with respect to belief in God? Wouldn't it leave them free of any impact brought about by knowing God because there's no way to find anything about them in Scripture? If this approach does leave them free of any impact brought by knowing God, as it seems to do, this can't be the right way to understand those texts.

How, then, should we understand these texts? How can knowing God impact every sort of truth, every sort of knowledge? If the Thomas Rule is right as far as it goes but doesn't go far enough, and if the fundamentalist is just wrong, then what is left?

In the entire history of Christian thought—of theology, philosophy, philosophy of religion, and ideas about the relation of philosophy or theology to science—I know of only one other proposal that has tried to answer that question, and this proposal is the one that seems to me right. It was made by the late Professor Herman Dooyeweerd of the Free University of Amsterdam, who took over the idea that there needs to be a distinctively biblical view of every subject from his predecessor, Abraham Kuyper.

Before we tackle Dooyeweerd's proposal, however, it is crucial for us to understand what a religious belief is. The issue here is not which religion is *true*; we already know that. The issue is rather what a religious belief *is*.

In my nearly forty years of work on courses in comparative religion, I've noticed that the earlier authors in the field thought that this issue—what a religious belief is—was important and offered their readers a definition. Of course, they differed widely in what they offered. By the twentieth century, authors had started to offer definitions that were disjunctions of all the previous proposals. They'd say that a religious belief is either this or this or this or this. But that kind of answer didn't seem to work either. By mid-century, many scholars took comfort from Wittgenstein's argument that precise definitions are seldom achieved and not necessary for most purposes. Wittgenstein denied that if we use the same word for several things, those things *must* have some defining characteristic in common: He told scholars not just to assume that those things have some defining characteristic in common but to look to see if they do. Many religious studies scholars were all too happy to give up the project of defining, so toward the close of that century we find in effect comparative religion books saying, "Well, we don't know what it is, but here's another book on it"—a position that would be funny were not so much at stake.

I thought I'd take Wittgenstein's advice to look and see whether there is a common element

to all religious beliefs. After I'd pondered the many proposals and examined a host of them for some time, the common defining characteristic of religious belief, the characteristic found in the central beliefs of all religions, dawned on me. (I was looking not only at the major traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam but also at early and later Taoism; at the religious texts of ancient Babylon, of Egypt, of the Greeks and Romans; and at less influential traditions including such traditions as those of the Trobian Islanders.) All of them have only one thing in common: every religion takes something to be divine. While they disagree on the description of what it is that is divine, they all agree on what it means to be divine. They all agree that the divine is whatever has utterly unconditional reality; it's what is "just there." Everything else depends on the divine, but the divine just *is*. There's no explanation for it, so it makes no sense to ask why it is. Another way to put this point is to say that while the different traditions disagree about *what* or *who* has divine status, they all agree about what that status is.

This status has, of course, different names. I've just used "utterly unconditional reality." John Calvin used "self-existent." Spinoza called it that which is "uncaused and unpreventable." Dooyeweerd uses the term "absolute," meaning it is that which has absolute existence and so doesn't depend on anything.

Following the Reformers, I hold that everybody puts something into the status of being what it is that everything else depends on while it doesn't depend on anything. I also agree with them that it's not simply the case that everybody either believes in God or does not believe in God. Rather, everybody either believes in God or puts something else into the status of divinity that belongs only to God. Everyone has a religious belief, then; the major distinction is whether a person believes in the true God or a false one. Paul puts the point this way in Romans 1: What happened to the human race was that they rebelled against God, turned the truth of God into a lie, and began to worship and serve something God created instead of the Creator. This is not the view that is popular today. The prevailing view now is that either one believes in God or one is not religious. But following Paul, the Reformers insisted that a person has either the true God or a false God. Luther puts it in his usual blunt way: "Man is like a jackass. Somebody always rides his back. It's either God or the devil." I'm proposing what it means to have a god, any god, not only the true one: it means to have a divinity belief, a belief in something utterly unconditional on which everything else depends.

Dooyeweerd seizes on this point as providing a way to see how belief in God (or any other divinity belief) can impact every kind of truth, including theories. Roughly, his account goes like this. A theory offers a hypothesis to explain something: we call the hypothesis an "explainer." Whatever is explained is presented as importantly *dependent* on the explainer postulated by that hypothesis. To be precise, a theory needs to specify whether the explainer itself is dependent on yet other explainers or not. If it is dependent, we at least need to know the *kind* of thing(s) it depends on. But either an explainer depends on something else, or it does not. If it does not, then it is—by our definition—divine. If it does, then whatever it ultimately depends on is divine. Therefore, any theory that takes some part, aspect, principle, etc., drawn from creation as the ultimate explainer has given it divine status. And whatever is given that status guides theory-making in such a way that subsequent theories differ from what they would be were something different given that status.

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Suppose, for example, someone posits matter as the ultimate explainer. The theory is that everything either is matter or depends on matter. Could such a person have the same view of ethics as someone who holds another view of what the ultimate explainer is? The history of philosophy shows that the answer to that question is, no, not at all. Similarly, a materialist wouldn't have the same

view of, say, what it means for something to be beautiful or the same view of justice as a non-materialist. Even the concepts of ordinary objects of experience differ if we take into account the ways in which the materialist and the non-materialist assume that the properties combined in them are related. If I sit at the lunch table with a materialist and I say, "Pass the salt," he knows what the saltshaker is. He picks it up and passes it down to me. However, his concept of that object isn't the same as mine. At a surface level—a level at which all we care about is the object that has the salt in it—yes, it's the same. But a concept of a thing includes everything that is true of it (which is why we never actually possess a complete concept of any individual thing). Now suppose my concept of the saltshaker includes that it's beautiful. I say, "That saltshaker is beautiful, isn't it?" He might even agree at the common sense level. However, if we probe the contents of our concepts more deeply, it will turn out that he doesn't believe there's really any such thing as beauty; there's only matter. Or if he does admit that there are non-physical properties such as beauty, he insists that they are wholly the creations of physical properties and laws. In other words, if we were to examine our concepts in enough detail, we would discover that at a deeper level, we're not agreeing on what the object is that we're talking about. In a similar way, says Dooyeweerd, an explainer proposed by a hypothesis will also be viewed as a different sort of thing and will thus explain other things in a very different way, depending on what is presupposed as the ultimate explainer. And the ultimate explainer can only be the reality that has divine status.

This, then, is Dooyeweerd's interpretation of the Scriptures that we started with. His view is that every theory, every concept, every interpretation is colored—is unavoidably slanted—in the direction of whatever a person sees to be divine. Those who don't see the divine as the biblical transcendent Creator will make it some part of the world instead. And regarding anything in the world as self-existent will slant, guide, and control the (deeper) content of every concept, including concepts of hypotheses.

How does Dooyeweerd's interpretation help develop a distinctively Christian view? It points to the importance of rejecting every view that regards anything in creation as divine. For one who believes in God, it's not numbers, space, or matter that are self-existent; it's not logical laws or sensations; it's not any of the vast number of proposals that have been paraded by us for the last 2600 years through the history of philosophy and science. Such proposals may go by the name metaphysics when they are, in fact, religious.

The name given to this way of explaining, the way that identifies what part of the world all the rest depends on, is "reduction." A reductionist explanation is one that claims to have found the part of the world that everything else depends on. That is why we have that long history of proposals: reality is matter, no it's form, no it's form and matter, no it's numbers, no it's logic, no it's logic plus matter, no it's sensations, no it's logic plus sensations, no it's mathematics plus sensations, etc. What should a Christian say then? How does belief in God impact all this? A Christian should say, "These are all wrong. They are all examples of regarding part of creation as the Creator. The ultimate explainer is no part of creation at all. Every one of these divinity candidates is real, but they all depend on God. In other words, the Christian would adopt a systematically non-reductionist approach to every sort of theory, every sort of knowledge, and every concept of everything.

This approach is, at least, a way of seeing how those scripture texts are to be understood. It's a proposal that not only makes sense but seems to be the truer one the longer that one looks at it. Is it the whole story? Is that all there is to having belief in God impact all truth and knowledge? I don't know. Dooyeweerd himself never said it was the whole story. He said that here was a place to start. At least our theory should be non-reductionist. He then offered some impressive examples of theories that explain the natures of creatures in a non-reductionist way. He said, in effect, that if one wants to see what a non-reductionist theory looks like, here are several examples. Are his theories the only possible non-reductionist explanations? Can we be sure they're right? His answer was "No." He once said to me, "Perhaps every theory I've put forward will need to be changed or abandoned." He was showing us a program for theorizing, an approach that honors the scriptures

we started with. His attitude was that if anyone can use this theory to construct better non-reductionist theories than the ones he offered, he or she should go to it.

Perhaps this discussion has now gotten a bit too abstract. Maybe at this point we need to apply this theory to an ordinary and familiar belief. We'll take the belief that is supposed to be the great counter-example to the claim I've been making. I've been saying that at a deeper level, our most ordinary concepts differ relative to what we hold to be divine. I've also been saying that this is true of concepts in theories as well as concepts of things like saltshakers. The great objection to this claim is that one plus one makes two is a truth that's the same for everybody. We will see if that is a truth that really is the same for everyone.

As with the saltshaker, the concept that 1 + 1 = 2 is one upon which people do agree at a surface level. Usually when this concept is presented to us—even in grade school—we intuitively think that it is a necessary truth. We don't think that one and one is two only *this* time. We think that it couldn't fail to be true. We think that the place or the time of adding the numbers doesn't matter; one and one are always going to make two. However, there is a deeper level to this concept too, as there was with the saltshaker, a level that can be exposed by questions people have asked about it, questions to which they have proposed theories as answers. These theories suggest that going more deeply into the concepts of 1 + 1 = 2 reveals important differences in the ways the equation is understood and that these differences are due to the divinity beliefs that they presuppose. (Before we go on with this example, we should consider one quick point: We need to be aware at the outset that when we deal with 1 + 1 = 2, we're talking about abstract numbers, not objects. A spark is one thing, and a pile of gunpowder is another thing, and together they make an explosion, which is very unlike two things. But when we deal with abstract quantity, one and one is always going to end up two.)

What are some of the questions about this concept that require a theory to answer? One of them goes like this: "What do those marks stand for; what are we talking about here?" For example, if we make this mark—*table*—we know what that stands for. Whether the word is in English or another language—e.g., mesa—it still stands for the same things. However, what do "1" or "2 "or "+" or "=" stand for? What are those things? If they're not objects that we perceive like raindrops or sparks or gunpowder, what are they? A second question is this: How do we know that 1 + 1 = 2 is true? Granted, we all have the sort of intuition about it that I mentioned earlier: from the time we are first told of it, we say "Sure, that's right; it can't be wrong." But *how* do we know it; how do we attain that knowledge? Why does it strike us all as true, even though we never see the things that it's about? We should take a quick look at the answers people have proposed.

I've been saying that at a deeper level, our most ordinary concepts differ relative to what we hold to be divine. . . The great objection to this claim is that one plus one makes two is a truth that's the same for everybody.

The first answer is one I call the "number-world theory." This theory suggests that there is actually another dimension of reality in which there are real things called numbers. In fact, what is in this other dimension of reality are all the natural numbers, the fractions, the decimals, the roots, etc. They are all there. Numerical relationships and laws are there as well. So the reason 1 + 1 = 2 is true is that there are real objects in the number world, and since the number world is eternal and changeless, what we find out about it also never changes. In fact, according to the number-world advocates, the truths about numbers and the laws that govern them are what structure and govern the world we live in. According to them, the ultimate explainer of our world is the number world, and the number world is completely self-existent.

Does anything about this claim sound like a divinity belief? The number world is supposed to be eternal and changeless since it never came into being, since it can never pass away, and since it explains all the things in our world. The great mathematician, Leibnitz, held this view. He was once asked by one of his students, "Why is one and one always two, and how do we know this?" Leibnitz replied, "One and one equals two is an eternal, immutable truth that would be so whether or not there were things to count or people to count them." In other words, whether the world we live in existed or not, the number world would exist. Pythagoras held a version of this theory. So did Plato. In fact, even today a plurality of mathematicians hold some version of it.

Over against the number-world theory, Bertrand Russell said it is ridiculous to think that there is another dimension with all the numbers in it. He denied that math was even about quantity at all! According to Russell, math is just a short-cut way of writing logic. What exist are logical sets and classes and logical laws, not numbers and mathematical laws. However, while the supposed residents of the number-world theory are all fictions, logical classes and logical laws are real; in fact, they have absolute reality. For Russell says that by taking us into logic, math takes us into that realm of "absolute necessity that holds for this world or for all possible worlds." So I ask again, does anything about that claim sound like a divinity belief? He claims that logic is what is self-existent; its truths and laws are eternal and changeless and are what govern this world and any other possible world.

John Stuart Mill rejected both the number-world theory and Russell's claim that math reduces to logic. He wrote a three-volume book on logic, and in the last volume he deals with mathematics. Mill holds this view: all that we can know to exist are our own sensations. In other words, all we know are what we can see, taste, hear, and smell. Even though everyone takes for granted that these perceptions represent real objects that exist independently of us, Mill says that we can never know that. All we know are our own perceptions. This belief controls how Mill views math as well as objects of perception. Mill says that 1 and 2 and + stand for sensations, not abstract numbers or logical classes. He denies the point I made earlier, that 1 + 1 = 2 is about abstract numbers rather than objects. For him, number symbols do indeed stand for this drop of water, that spark, this pile of gunpowder. He concludes that we *don't* know that one and one is always two! That belief is only a generalization of our sensations. His position admits that one and one might make five and seven-eighths tomorrow or in some place we're not now observing. That would be odd, he thinks, like finding a black swan; but it's not impossible. And this point is true for all mathematical relationships. We never know when they are going to be true and when they are not.

Now I ask, is Mill's concept of 1 + 1 = 2 the same as Russell's? Is it the same as that of the people who hold the number-world theory? Isn't it clear that although they all started by conceptualizing the same necessary relation, their divinity beliefs came into play and altered their concept of that formula? And haven't those differences now resulted in importantly different meanings for 1 + 1 = 2?

We will consider one more example of this same point. The American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey answers our two questions in yet another way. To the question "What do those marks on the board stand for?" Dewey would answer "Nothing." They don't stand for anything. In fact, that's the wrong question because every concept, every theory, and language itself is a tool that we create to help us survive. And it makes no sense to ask of a tool whether it is true or false. If I point to a shovel standing in the corner and ask, "Is that true or false?" you don't know what I'm talking about. If I look at a saw and say "I'm sorry, that saw is false," would that make any sense at all? Dewey says that same thing about 1 + 1 = 2. He says it's a tool, and a tool is neither true nor false. It simply does some jobs and not others. In fact, it's not a discovery of a real numerical relation but something we *invented* to do certain jobs. So the equation doesn't represent anything; its meaning is its use; and one can only find out what it's good for by using it. If one tries to jack up the car with it, one will find that it won't work. However, if one uses it to try to add up one's checkbook, one will find that it does work. Still, the fact that it works is not the same as saying it's

true. And it's not. It's neither true nor false; it just works or it doesn't.

Behind this interpretation is Dewey's belief that what is truly real is the physical world along with the biological life forms that inhabit it. He believes that we, along with all other living things, are just critters trying to survive. And the key to our survival is the making and use of *tools*. That's why he sees everything as a tool, as neither true nor false and as working or not working rather than true or false. This is the controlling idea in Dewey's theory. This idea is the ultimate explainer because, he says, the physical/biological world is all there is. In fact, he deliberately places his belief over against belief in God this way: Don't you understand? There is no absolute Being, there's only the universe. (According to our definition, however, if there is only the physical/ biological universe, there is nothing for it to depend on, and it would be absolute and thus divine. So rather than avoiding religion altogether, Dewey's position merely advocates another God surrogate, and a divinity belief is in control of this theory, too.)

By now, one might ask, "What would a non-reductionist view of mathematics look like?"

We should begin to answer by reminding ourselves that God has created the world we inhabit: the objects around us, the properties that they exhibit, and the laws that govern them. We may also notice that the properties things exhibit are of many different kinds. They exhibit physical properties and sensory properties and logical properties, for example; but there's also a "how much" to them. That is, they exhibit quantity. We abstract that quantity; we set up a symbol system to represent that quantity; and we discover relationships among quantities. The symbol system is our invention, but we find quantities and their relations in God's creation. The reason that objects have quantity and that their quantitative properties are governed by mathematical laws is that God made the world that way. That recognition is a first step toward a view of mathematics that doesn't either regard quantity as divine or reduce it to another aspect of the world for the reason that the other aspect is divine. Moreover, this difference in approach applies as well to all the theories of philosophy and the sciences: all alike have vacillated between picking explainers from the world that are enthroned as divine or picking explainers that are dependent on others because the others are enthroned as divine. The Christian perspective, then, is to reject that approach to explanation and construct systematically non-reductionist explanations instead.

Since philosophers call this kind of explanation reductionist, one more point needs to be made about that method of explanation. Reductionist explanations involve dependency, obviously. The whole idea is to find the part or aspect of creation that is divine and which therefore explains every thing else that is not identical with it. However, the proposal of non-reductionist theories sometimes meets opposition in that these theories, too, talk about dependency—they take everything to depend on God. So it is asked, "Why isn't that reduction too?" The answer is this: When someone picks some particular facet of the world around us and explains everything else as dependent on it, the result is to make that facet far more real, and thus far more important, than the rest of reality. The (ontological) status and importance of the other aspects of the world is thereby reduced and sold short, while at the same time the importance of the selected aspect is overestimated relative to others that are said to depend on it. It's the diminishing of the level of reality and importance of the other facets of the world that makes such an explanation guilty of reduction, not the fact that some things depend on others. This is why interpreting the universe as entirely dependent on God, so that no one part of the universe explains or generates all the rest, is not reductionist. Such an interpretation does not reduce the

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universe to God, even though God is what it all depends on. For in the dependency of all creation directly on God, every side and facet of creation is left equally real, and no side of it is reduced in its role or importance relative to the rest. In Theism there is dependency without reduction.

The program that Dooyeweerd has developed for theories isn't an easy one. One of the niceties of the fundamentalist position is that it gives everyone the idea that a sincere believer can confer with the Scripture and with other believers and find the answer to virtually any question posed by any science. This approach sounds very appealing and is much easier than the program just laid out. The fundamentalist approach is also tempting because we'd like to think that things are that simple. However, the truth is, it *just ain't so*. What we must think through is how to overcome the reductionist tendencies and explanations that have been long ensconced in theories about everything from math to physics to logic to history to sociology to ethics, etc. For virtually any major theory in any field, its proposed explainers are either divine or reducible to another part of creation taken as divine.

One final point needs to be made. In the history of the scholastic tradition, many Christian thinkers actually baptized reductionist explanations and said that the explanations were now acceptable. These thinkers said that it is all right to have a theory that says everything in the universe depends on form and matter or just on matter or on math or on logic or on sensations or on whatever. They said that any theory can be acceptable as long as one adds to the whatever "and God created that." They said that since adding on this provision overcomes the character of any such theory, overhauling the entire history of theories is not necessary. They said that a new non-reductionist theory is not needed. They said that one can proceed to theorize in the same way that everyone else has always theorized—by reducing everything in creation to this, that, or another side of it—as long as one adds "and God created this too."

Is this approach right? Most theistic thinkers have thought so, but according to the Scripture we started with, it is not right. The biblical teaching is that belief in God impacts *all* knowledge and truth. However, according to this scholastic proposal, reduction is acceptable as long as we tack on the claim that whatever we say everything reduces to depends, in turn, on God. In that case, the theory would be the same whether we tacked on that provision or not! Nothing would change as far as the explanatory power of the theory is concerned. If, for example, everything is being said to depend on matter, and then we just add "and God created matter," the theory is the same whether we add that stipulation or not. Nothing is explained any differently; everything is still held to be physical or to depend on the physical (except God). However, if adding the claim "the physical depends on God" makes no difference to the theory, then belief in God makes no difference in that theory. Thus, the idea that it's acceptable to have a reduction theory as long as we add that its ultimate explainer depends on God violates those texts which say that belief in God impacts all truth. The explanation afforded by such a theory is religiously neutral in just the way that those texts forbid.

For this reason, I commend the program for theistic theorizing proposed by Dooyeweerd.